

Lesson 15 The Age of Christian Empire: The First Council of Nicea (325)

The Arian Controversy

- Arianism found its origins in Alexandria, Egypt.
- Denied the Deity of Christ.
- Christ was the first and noblest of beings the father formed out of nothing.
- Though he was superior in power and glory to other created beings he was inferior in both to the Father.
- “The Son has a beginning, but, . . . God is without beginning.”
- Set his teachings to music.



The Arian Controversy

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- Constantine's initial reaction was to consider this dispute as utterly trifling and unimportant.
- Constantine set a letter encouraging the men not to engage in idle disputes but to seek peace with each other.
- Around 320, Alexander excommunicated Arius from the church in Alexandria. Arius in turn looked to Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia for support and won his backing.
- Constantine would be forced to act decisively to quench the growing controversy that was threatening to tear the Eastern portion of his empire apart.

The Council Meets

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The Council Meets

- The idea for the council did not come from the bishops but Constantine himself.
- Two reasons for the council:
 - Unity in the church.
 - Unity in the empire.
- Majority of the bishops were from the Eastern portion of the empire:
 - 300 Bishops
 - 2,000 elders and deacons
- Having declared himself a bishop and an apostle Constantine called the meeting to order.

The Council Meets



- Early on there were three groups:
 - Supports of Arius
 - Opponents of Arius
 - Those who did not understand his teachings
- Once it was made known that Arius believed that Christ had been created instead of having existed eternally the fireworks began.
- Nearly everyone agreed that they should condemn Arius.

Council's Key Assertions

- *Christ was very God of very God:*
- *Christ was of one substance with the Father*
- *Christ was begotten, not made*
- *Christ became human for us and for our salvation*
- The council moved to summarize their rulings in a binding creedal statement that eventually became known as the Nicene Creed.

The Council Rules

- Of the 300 bishops present, only two in addition to Arius refused to sign the creed thereby resulting in their banishment from the church as well as imperial exile. Two years later, in 327 favoring peace over truth, Constantine tried to reinstate Arius. He was opposed by then Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria on the grounds that Arius still did not believe in the deity of Christ. (Jones, 40)
- “Although the decision reached was right, the way of reaching it by the combined efforts of the Emperor and the bishops and enforcing it by the power of the State, showed the departure of the Catholic Church from Scripture.” (Broadbent, 44)